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respect paid to him by the king was paid, not as to the head of the religion, but as to the personal teacher. The Burman in his prayers, or rather his meditations for the good of others, prays for his teacher before his parents. The five pleasant things in the world are: the shade of trees, the shade of parents, the shade of teachers, the shade of princes, the shade of the Buddha.

It is this republican tendency of Buddhism that gives it such a wonderful hold on the people. Rank does not confer on the mendicant greater honour, or release him from any of his obligations. The most learned and famous Sadaw must go forth every morning to beg his daily food. If he is very aged and decrepit he may be excused to some extent, but every now and again he must totter forth to preserve the letter of the law and show a proper example of humility. His dress is the same as that of the most recently admitted ko-yin, and in the eyes of the world he holds honour, not because he controls the affairs of the assembly, but because he is so close to the verge of Ne'ban. This feeling extends beyond the order into ordinary life. The religion brings all men down to the same level. The poor man may be a king of nats in the next life; the wealthy sinner may frizzle in the awful pains of hell. There is no difference between man and man but that which is established by superiority in virtue; and hence it is that the state of women among Buddhists is so very much higher than it is among Oriental peoples, who do not hold by that faith. The Burmese woman enjoys many rights which her European sister is even now clamouring for.

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We have seen that the whole male population of Burma enters the monastery, and that the great majority leave after a very short stay. Some, however, grow fond of the monastic ways, and remain to study and qualify themselves to be mendicants. In becoming pyin-sin they do not acquire any new spiritual power, nor do they constitute themselves directly teachers of the people. In a religious system, which acknowledges no supreme Deity, it is impossible for any one to intercede with a Creator whose existence is denied, in behalf of a man who can only attain to a higher state by his own pious life and earnest self-denial. The

religious are merely initiated into a higher stage, and become members of an order in which every individual is aiming at a greater degree of sanctity. The doors of the kyaung are always open as well to those who wish to enter as to those who wish to leave it. The longest stayer has the greatest honour. A visitor monk, who has the greater number of wās, who has passed many ~~lengthy seasons~~ in his yellow robe, will be shikho'd to, will receive the homage of the head of the monastery, even if he be a gaing-ōk, and the stranger but a simple pōngyi.

In his ordination, therefore, the pyin-sin takes upon himself no burden in the shape of a cure of souls. He is not a priest like the Christian minister, who undertakes to guide others to salvation. He has no trouble for his food; a pious and kindly population supplies him far beyond his requirements, and expects no service in return for this support. He has no sermons to prepare; it is not expected that he will preach the law, and when of his own accord he occasionally does give an exposition, it is not any feeble exegcogitation of his own, but the thoughts and words of the Great Master himself, or of the highest and noblest of the men of old, that he delivers. His natural rest is never broken in upon by calls to administer consolation and comfort to the sick and the dying. Even his leisure is seldom interrupted to be present at the last rites for the dead. He is not a minister of religion, and all he has to do is to seek his own deliverance and salvation. All that is compulsory on him is the observance of continence, poverty, and humility, with tenderness to all living things, abstraction from the world, and a strict observance of a number of moral precepts, all tending to inculcate these things. It is curious perhaps, therefore, that greater numbers do not don the yellow robe. As it is, however, there is no lack of them.

Previous to admission the postulant must have reached the age of twenty years and have obtained his parents' permission. The origin of this stipulation dates from the earliest times. When Gautama attained the Buddhahood his half-brother Nanda was next heir, and was about to be proclaimed Crown Prince when he was persuaded to become yahan. Thereupon Thudaw-dana, the king, obtained a

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CHAPTER XIV

SCHISMATICS

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THE Buddhist religion is to its adherents the full and entire truth, and has remained almost entirely free from the schisms and dissensions which have sprung up in most other religions, especially in those of Europe, where the progress of science has caused the rise of multitudes of sects. Fully bound by their religion, in the complete sense of the word, are only the worshipper of the fetish whose object of adoration hangs up in his house, or dangles about his neck, and the Buddhist, whose teachers and models of faith rise and fall in flesh and blood before his eyes, vanishing to Ne'ban, there to be freed from all earthly concern, but leaving behind them as a guide to the same last resting-place the sacred World-Law, and at the same time the Assembly of the Perfect, who appear as an incarnation of that Law for the building up of piety among the laity. The yahans have already beaten down the adversaries within them, and, clothed with the yellow robe of transfiguration, exhibit in their persons the glorious results of adherence to the Law. Thus the reverence paid to the monks is a kind of spiritual hero-worship in the sense in which Carlyle speaks of it.

The man yet a slave in the bondage of his lusts and passions gazes in admiration on these models, to whom the recognition of earthly vanity gives strength enough to reject all the allurements of the world and to live only for the future. The spirits are always present to the fetish-worshipper, for hideous devils scare him away from every natural object. So the great secret of the existence of the world is ever present to the Buddhist, and while in the political and social

● 711 life of the European nations the manifold character of the questions of the day attract and occupy the minds and influence the religious beliefs of the people, the eyes of the Burman Buddhist are uninterruptedly fixed on the dark mysteries which surround his beginning, his end, and every moment of his existence. His religion enters into every action of his life, and its admirable system of morality need fear comparison with none other on earth; while everything else appears but as a matter of detail, or a different method of viewing the same things. He is not at all unwilling to enter into discussion as to what is the true religion: whether only one is the right, whether all have sprung from the same root and have only now assumed different forms, or whether, as the Deity gave to the hand different fingers, so He has given to mankind different paths. But the arguments of the proselytiser have but very little success, while, on the other hand, there is nowadays practically no attempt to gain converts to their own national faith. This is no doubt in great part due to the absence of all ministerial duties in the brethren of the yellow robe, but also to a belief that true faith can only grow up gradually, and cannot be forced on the mind. At the same time there is not a hint of bigotry. In Mandalay all forms of religion were allowed to be carried on without the least semblance of opposition. The solemn call of the muezzin; the tinkling of the convent-bell, under the cross of Rome; the noisy rites of devil and fire-worshippers; even the ceremonies of the former fierce enemies of Buddhism, the Brahmins—all of these were exercised without the least hindrance, and the processions of the various forms of faith passed one another in the street with the most complete amicability. Even a convert is left unharmed. There may be a sense of wonder and contempt for the man who voluntarily resigns his high hopes as a Buddhist for the probable fallacies of another cult, but there is never any real attempt at oppression.

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795 Heresies, therefore, never originate with the people; any there are come from the monasteries, but even these relate more to matters of discipline and internal regulation than to real points of faith. The yahans are very clever in dispute, and are far from being averse to it. The better educated of

them know their ground perfectly well, and are quite able to take full advantage of the strong points of their position. They rely entirely on the holy books, and these they have at their fingers' ends. It is granted by all that they are, almost without exception, entirely free from intolerance, and are quite unable to comprehend the zeal for conversion. A venerable Sadaw in Bhamo came and listened attentively to a Burmese sermon of Dr. Mason, the celebrated American missionary. When it was over he came and complimented him on its depth and grasp, and then suggested that the reverend doctor should go with him to offer up worship before the image of Buddha! The monks do not think, with cynical mockery, that every one should be allowed to go his own way and be blessed after his own fashion; on the contrary, they seek zealously for new truths and explanations of mysteries; but they hold it presumptuous and unwarrantable, in view of the dark secrets which envelop the life of man from its dawning to its close, to set up each his individual opinion with dogmatic certainty as the only true form and the only one that can save. They take their standpoint on the actual state of things, on the misery and sorrow which is externally bound up with the nature of the human body as it exists. They devote themselves entirely to preparing the spirit for its delivery, when it will finally rest, raised above every fear of new change, in the harmonious equipoise of Ne'ban. For this last and highest aim no hypotheses have to be assumed. They require no personal deity who would demand a special place in the system of the world, and in a possible danger to the cosmic system might incur the same risk of destruction. They remain entirely within the clearly defined horizon of their limit of vision, and are therefore very difficult to attack in argument.

Nevertheless schisms have arisen from time to time, and exist at the present day, but they have sprung more from revolt against excessive austerity, or corresponding laxity, than from any real difference on doctrinal points. The Lord Buddha had hardly died before one of the most aged of the disciples, Subhadra, thus addressed the assembled brethren: "Revered ones, cease to mourn. We are now happily released from the rule of the great Sramana; we shall no

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CHAPTER XVII

IMAGES

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THERE are few things which more irritate an educated Burman than to assert, or as most English do, calmly assume, that the Burmese are idolaters. The national idea is that idol-worship is especially the characteristic of the lowest savage tribes, and even fetichism is considered a superior faith. Therefore the accusation of bowing down to stocks and stones is intolerable, and the implication is combated with feverish energy. Where there are no prayers, in the technical sense of the word, there can be no idolatry. No one, not even Shin Gautama himself, can help a man in his strivings to lead a holy life. None but the individual in his own person can work out his special salvation, and he tries to do so by setting a splendid ideal before his mind. The words uttered before the impassive features of the Budh are not a supplication for mercy or aid, but the praises of the great Lord himself, through the contemplation of whose triumphant victory over passions and ignorance the most sinful may be led to a better state.

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There is no Supreme Being ; the Buddha himself, who even while he was on earth was no more than a perfect, sinless man, no longer exists to make intercession, were there any such power to which one might appeal. The only thing to be done is to praise, and in praising to strive to imitate, and through imitation to attain to the perfect knowledge, and so to the final deliverance, the exemption from the four burdens of heaviness, age, sickness, and death, which is the restful absorption of Ne'ban.

The worshippers of all creeds have always sought for a

special place wherein to pay their devotions. The Burman erects a pagoda over sacred relics, and puts up an image of the great Lord of Truth there, not to worship, but to afford a means to the pious of localising their feelings and concentrating their thoughts on the supreme model. The candles and smoky oil lamps, the fruits and flowers offered on the shrine, are no more signs of idolatry than the offertory bag placed on the altar by the Christian priest. The Yatana Kalapa is perfectly distinct on this point. Under the heading U'bhato Kotito Panha we find it written: "It is bootless to worship the Buddha; nothing is necessary but to revere him and the memory of him. Statues are only useful in so far as they refresh the memory; for as the farmer sows the seed and gathers in the grain in due season, so will the man who trusts in the Buddha and holds fast by his sacred Law obtain the deliverance and pass into Ne'ban. The earth and the Buddha are alike in themselves inert."

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There is thus no doubt left as to what the great master and his interpreters intended. The worship of the payā is nothing more than a simulation of the devotion which would be paid to Shin Gautama were he still upon earth. The Buddha is admired, he is lauded, he is tenderly loved; and this devotion is extended to the figures which are erected in remembrance of him, in recognition of his blameless life, the supreme wisdom which enabled him to teach the Law, and the great compassion and benevolence with which he regarded all living things. The characteristics of a Budh are the exercise of the Three Great Works of Perfection, the constant practising of the Ten Great Virtues, and the Five Renouncings; and to attain the deliverance, all must diligently strive to observe these. The Three Great Works of Perfection are:—

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1. Assistance afforded to parents and relations.
2. Great offerings made in this and previous existences, coupled with strict observance of the enactments of the Law.

3. Benevolent dispositions towards all sentient beings indiscriminately.

The Ten Great Virtues are:—liberality; observance of the precepts of the Law; retreat into lonely places; diligence;

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534 protect the poor man's crops. May the nats who dwell in the air and the earth defend from evil creatures the two fat bullocks which plough the fields. May the guardian nats of the house and the city keep from harm Chit U, their son, and little Ma Mi, their darling daughter. And may the merit of this offering be shared with their children and with all living beings. May the excellent Lord pity them, the good spirits smile on them, the holy assembly receive them. So shall Maung San Ya and Mama Gyi gain much merit and rejoice in presenting this bell. Weight, seventy-five viss."

Such dedications are found here and there, but they are not common, for half the honour of presenting the bell is lost if the common crowd can read what is written on it; and doubtless Maung Chit U, when he has been to an English school, and has got a place under Government, or in an English merchant's office, will be rather ashamed of the quaint humility of his father's offering.

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534 The bells are not intended to summon worshippers to their devotions. There is no necessity for such a call where there is no formal service. Every man is responsible to himself only for his religious state; no one else has anything directly to do with him, or can give him help. The monks themselves display but little concern in the spiritual state of the laity. If a man is to attain a favourable change in a succeeding existence, it must be by his own exertions. He knows the regular duty-days, and on these and on the special feast-days he goes to gain kutho for himself and better his chance towards a new transincorporation. If he is a fond man, he parcels out the merit acquired by his devotions among those members of his family or friends who have not been to the pagoda. The use of the bells is to direct attention to the fact of the lauds of the Buddha having been recited. The worshipper, when he has finished, goes to one of the bells and strikes it three times, to bring to the notice of the guardian spirits and the four worlds what he has been doing. There are always a number of deer's antlers and billets of wood lying near the bell for this purpose. None of them have clappers, and metal is not used to strike them. There is no objection whatever to a non-Buddhist striking

the bell; it is indeed rather a kindly action, for the more clangour there is the more likely the nats are to observe the devotions going on. After the bell itself has been struck it is proper to strike the ground, so that the spirits of the earth may know as well as the guardians of the air. Most of the bells have a fine tone, and a flick with the finger is sufficient to cause a vibration through the whole twenty-five tons of metal in Maha Ganda. What sound the Mengôn bell, second only in size to that presented by the Empress Catherine to Moscow, is capable of producing, will never, probably, be known, for the supports have given way, and half of the rim rests on the ground. But, as Colonel Yule says, it would have at any time required a battering-ram to bring out its music. It has, since the annexation, been hung by the enterprise of the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company.

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Besides those suspended round the precincts of the payā, the hti, or umbrella, on the top of the edifice, is always hung with a multitude of bells. Those on the more sacred shrines are very often entirely gold or silver. Several on the Shwe Dagôn are of gold, studded with precious stones, and are worth many hundred pounds sterling apiece. These, of course, are furnished with tongues, and the slightest breeze causes a constant harmonious tinkling, dear to the worshipper's heart. The object of these bells is identical with that of those below on the platform—to attract the attention of the good spirits in Tawa-deintha, and other abodes of the nat-déwas on Mount Myinmo.

Though the bells are very well moulded, the mode of casting them is of the most primitive possible character. A mould of clay is formed to represent the 'inside. This is covered with bees'-wax to the proposed thickness of the metal, and over this again is placed a heavy layer of clay, mixed with chopped paddy straw. Through this outer covering there are a number of funnel holes in parallel rings at distances of six or nine inches, and through these the molten metal is poured in, melting and taking the place of the bees'-wax, which flows out at the bottom. Straws inserted through the clay let out the air and steam. Thus the bell is formed in a series of rings one above the other. The

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CHAPTER XX

DUTY DAYS

THERE are four uboné, or duty days, in every lunar month, on which all good Burmans are expected to go and worship at the pagodas. These are the eighth of the crescent, the full moon, the eighth of the waning, and the change, of which the second and the fourth are the more sacred. As the monks have nothing to do with looking after the spiritual state of the people, it is entirely a matter to be settled by one's self whether any particular worship day is to be observed or not. If you conclude that strict religious observances are only necessary for your spiritual well-being on the day of the full moon, or at any rate that you may leave out the eighth of the crescent and waning moon, then the uboné does not concern you at all, and you may proceed about your ordinary business without being considered a reprobate. The very devout may go to the pagoda on all the four sacred days of the month; but if you choose to omit one or several, or substitute an ordinary day for that provided by religious custom, there is no one to take you to task for it. Were a Burman never to go to the pagoda at all, or fail to do so for any considerable time, he would indeed soon get a very bad character among his neighbours, and might even be formally excommunicated by the yahans. There is, however, practically no constraint save the force of public opinion. But the duties of worship are so light, and so dependent in their details upon yourself, and there is so much amusement to be got out of a visit to the pagoda on an uboné, that few, even of the most worldly-minded, miss any great number of the appointed days, and a special festival is always carefully observed.

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CHAPTER XXII

NATS AND SPIRIT-WORSHIP

NOTWITHSTANDING that Buddhism has been the established religion in Burma since shortly after the third great council at Patalipootra in 241 B.C. (283 of the sacred era), and that the purest form of the faith exists, and is firmly believed in; yet, throughout the whole Ashe Pyi (the Eastern country), both in Upper and Lower Burma, the old geniolatry still retains a firm hold on the minds of the people. Missionaries say that it is a natural revolting of the human mind against the denial of the existence of a Supreme Being, superior to man, and controlling his destiny. Government officers assert that the retention of the prior religion (for it is undoubtedly a kind of second religion) is due to the fact that surrounding, and scattered about amongst the Buddhist Burmans, are numerous tribes—Karens, Kachins, and others—who have no form of belief but nat-worship, the reverencing of the spirits of nature. As a simple matter of fact, it is undeniable that the propitiating of the nats is a question of daily concern to the lower class Burman, while the worship at the pagoda is only thought of once a week. For the nat may prove destructive and hostile at any time, whereas the acquisition of kutho at the pagoda is a thing which may be set about in a business-like way, and at proper and convenient seasons. It is just the difference between avoiding a motor car and avoiding the circular saw in a timber mill.

Before proceeding further, it will be well to discuss the word "nat" itself. General Phayre and Bishop Bigandet did not finally settle whether Nat is derived from the Sanskrit term nath, meaning "master, husband, lord," or not. The

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LIVING BELIEFS

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seemed to me a mystery such as I could not understand. But when I went to the people, I found that it was simple enough to them; for I found that they remembered their former lives often, that children, young children, could tell who they were before they died, and remember details of that former existence. As they grew older the remembrance grew fainter and fainter, and at length almost died away. But in many children it was quite fresh, and was believed in beyond possibility of a doubt by all the people. So I saw that the teachings of their sacred books and the thoughts of the people were not at one in this matter.

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Again, I read that there was no God. Nats there were, spirits of great power like angels, and there was the Buddha (the just man made perfect), who had worked out for all men the way to reach surcease from evil; but of God I saw nothing. And because the Buddha had reached heaven (Nirvana), it would be useless to pray to him. For, having entered into his perfect rest, he could not be disturbed by the sharp cry of those suffering below; and if he heard, still he could not help; for each man must through pain and sorrow work out for himself his own salvation. So all prayer is futile.

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And then I remembered I had seen the young mother going to the pagoda on the hilltop with a little offering of a few roses or an orchid spray, and pouring out her soul in passionate supplication to Someone—Someone unknown to her sacred books—that her firstborn might recover of his fever, and be to her once more the measureless

6 THE SOUL OF A PEOPLE CH.

776 delight of her life ; and it would seem to me that
779 she must believe in a God and in prayer after all.
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• 771 So though I found much in these books that
779 was believed by the people, and much that was
182 to them the guiding influence of their lives, yet I
was unable to trust to them altogether, and I was
in doubt where to seek for the real beliefs of these
people. If I went to their monks, their holy men,
the followers of the great teacher, Gaudama, they
referred me to their books as containing all that
a Buddhist believed ; and when I pointed out the
discrepancies, they only shook their heads, and said
that the people were an ignorant people and con-
fused their beliefs in that way.

779 When I asked what was a Buddhist, I was told
795 that, to be a Buddhist, a man must be accepted into
182 the religion with certain rites, certain ceremonies, he
must become for a time a member of the community
of the monks of the Buddha, and that a Buddhist
was he who was so accepted, and who thereafter
held by the teachings of the Buddha.

But when I searched the life of the Buddha, I
could not find any such ceremonies necessary at all.
So that it seemed that the religion of the Buddha
was one religion, and the religion of the Buddhists
another ; but when I said so to the monks, they
were horror-struck, and said that it was because I
did not understand.

114 In my perplexity I fell back, as we all must, to
182 my own thoughts and those of my own people ; and
779 I tried to imagine how a Burman would act if he
101 came to England to search into the religion of the
English and to know the impulses of our lives.



CHAPTER II

HE WHO FOUND THE LIGHT—I

‘He who pointed out the way to those that had lost it.’
Life of the Buddha.

779 THE life-story of Prince Theiddatha, who saw the
771 light and became the Buddha twenty-five centuries
ago, has been told in English many times. It has
been told in translations from the Pali, from Burmese,
and from Chinese, and now everyone has read it.
The writers, too, of these books have been men of
great attainments, of untiring industry in searching
out all that can be known of this life, of gifts such
as I cannot aspire to. So that there is now nothing
new to learn of those long past days, nothing fresh
for me to tell, no discovery that can be made. And
yet in thinking out what I have to say about the
religion of the Burmese, I have found that I must
tell again some of the life of the Buddha, I must
rewrite this ten-times-told tale, of which I know
nothing new. And the reason is this: that although
I know nothing that previous writers have not known,
although I cannot bring to the task anything like
their knowledge, yet I have something to say that

II HE WHO FOUND THE LIGHT 17

they have not said. For they have written of him as they have learned from books, whereas I want to write of him as I have learned from men. Their knowledge has been taken from the records of the dead past, whereas mine is from the actualities of the living present.

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I do not mean that the Buddha of the sacred books and the Buddha of the Burman's belief are different persons. They are the same. But as I found it with their faith, so I find it with the life of their teacher. The Burmese regard the life of the Buddha from quite a different standpoint to that of an outsider, and so it has to them quite a different value, quite a different meaning, to that which it has to the student of history. For to the writer who studies the life of the Buddha with a view merely to learn what that life was, and to criticise it, everything is very different to what it is to the Buddhist who studies that life because he loves it and admires it, and because he desires to follow it. To the former the whole detail of every portion of the life of the Buddha, every word of his teaching, every act of his ministry, is sought out and compared and considered. Legend is compared with legend, and tradition with tradition, that out of many authorities some clue to the actual fact may be found. But to the Buddhist the important parts in the great teacher's life are those acts, those words, that appeal directly to him, that stand out bravely, lit with the light of his own experiences and feelings, that assist him in living his own life. His Buddha is the Buddha he understands, and who understood and sympathized with such as him.

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779 Other things may be true, but they are matters of
771 indifference.

To hear of the Buddha from living lips in this country, which is full of his influence, where the spire of his monastery marks every village, and where every man has at one time or another been his monk, is quite a different thing to reading of him in far countries, under other skies and swayed by other thoughts. To sit in the monastery garden in the dusk, in just such a tropic dusk as he taught in so many years ago, and hear the yellow-robed monk tell of that life, and repeat his teaching of love, and charity, and compassion—eternal love, perfect charity, endless compassion—until the stars come out in the purple sky, and the silver-voiced gongs ring for evening prayers, is a thing never to be forgotten. As you watch the starlight die and the far-off hills fade into the night, as the sounds about you become still, and the calm silence of the summer night falls over the whole earth, you know and understand the teacher of the Great Peace as no words can tell you. A sympathy comes to you from the circle of believers, and you believe, too. An influence and an understanding breathes from the nature about you—the same nature that the teacher saw—from the whispering fig-trees and the scented champaks, and the dimly seen statues in the shadows of the shrines, that you can never gain elsewhere. And as they tell you the story of that great life, they bring it home to you with reflection and comment, with application to your everyday existence, till you forget that he of whom they speak lived so long ago, so very long.

II HE WHO FOUND THE LIGHT 19

ago, and your heart is filled with sorrow when you remember that he is dead, that he is entered into his peace. 779
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I do not hope that I can convey much of this in my writing. I always feel the hopelessness of trying to put on paper the great thoughts, the intense feeling, of which Buddhism is so full. But still I can, perhaps, give something of this life as I have heard it, make it a little more living than it has been to us, catch some little of that spirit of sympathy that it holds for all the world.

Around the life of the Buddha has gathered much myth, like dust upon an ancient statue, like shadows upon the mountains far away, blurring detail here and there, and hiding the beauty. There are all sorts of stories of the great portents that foretold his coming: how the sun and the stars knew, and how the wise men prophesied. Marvels attended his birth, and miracles followed him in life and in death. And the appearance of the miraculous has even been heightened by the style of the chroniclers in telling us of his mental conflicts: by the personification of evil in the spirit man, and of desire in his three beautiful daughters. 779

All the teacher's thoughts, all his struggles, are materialized into forms, that they may be more readily brought home to the reader, that they may be more clearly realized by a primitive people as actual conflicts.

Therefore at first sight it seems that of all creeds none is so full of miracle, so teeming with the supernatural, as Buddhism, which is, indeed, the very reverse of the truth. For to the supernatural

II HE WHO FOUND THE LIGHT 29

And when I said that Yathodaya was also religious and had helped him in his thoughts, and that surely she would not have stopped him, the monk shook his head.

'Women are not like that,' he said.

And a woman said to me once: 'Surely she was very much to be pitied because her husband went away from her and her baby. Do you think that when she talked religion with her husband she ever thought that it would cause him to leave her and go away for ever? If she had thought that, she would never have done as she did. A woman would never help anything to sever her husband from her, not even religion. And when after ten years a baby had come to her! Surely she was very much to be pitied.' This woman made me understand that the highest religion of a woman is the true love of her husband, of her children; and what is it to her if she gain the whole world, but lose that which she would have?

All the story of Yathodaya and her dealings with her husband is full of the deepest pathos, full of passionate protest against her loss, even in order that her husband and all the world should gain. She would have held him, if she could, against the world, and deemed that she did well. And so, though it is probable that it was a great deal owing to Yathodaya's help, to her sympathy, to her support in all his difficulties, that Gaudama came to his final resolve to leave the world and seek for the truth, yet she acted unwittingly of what would be the end.

'She did not know,' said the woman. 'She

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30 THE SOUL OF A PEOPLE CH. II

779 helped her husband, but she did not know to what.
771 And when she was ill, when she was giving birth to
● her baby, then her husband left her. Surely she
was very much to be pitied.'

And so Yathodaya, the wife of the Prince Gaudama, who became the Buddha, is held in high honour, in great esteem, by all Buddhists. By the men, because she helped her husband to his resolve to seek for the truth, because she had been his great stay and help when everyone was against him, because if there had been no Yathodaya there had been perchance no Buddha. And by the women—I need not say why she is honoured by all women. If ever there was a story that appealed to woman's heart, surely it is this: her love, her abandonment, her courage, her submission when they met again in after-years, her protest against being sacrificed upon the altar of her husband's religion. Truly, it is all of the very essence of humanity. Whenever the story of the Buddha comes to be written, then will be written also the story of the life of Yathodaya his wife. And if one is full of wisdom and teaching, the other is full of suffering and teaching also. I cannot write it here. I have so much to say on other matters that there is no room. But some day it will be written. I trust, this old message to a new world.

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539 house, 'Give me a pinch of mustard-seed,' and it was
771 given readily. So with her treasure in her hand she
761 was going forth back to the Buddha full of delight,
when she remembered.

'Has ever anyone died in your household?' she asked, looking round wistfully.

The man answered 'Yes,' that death had been with them but recently. Who could this woman be, he thought, to ask such a question? And the woman went forth, the seed dropping from her careless fingers, for it was of no value. So she would try again and again, but it was always the same. Death had taken his tribute from all. Father or mother, son or brother, daughter or wife, there was always a gap somewhere, a vacant place beside the meal. From house to house throughout the city she went, till at last the new hope faded away, and she learned from the world, what she had not believed from the Buddha, that death and life are one.

[772] So she returned, and she became a nun, poor soul! taking on her the two hundred and twenty-seven vows, which are so hard to keep that nowadays nuns keep but five of them.¹

779 This is the teaching of the Buddha, that death is
761 inevitable; this is the consolation he offers, that all men must know death; no one can escape death;

[772] ¹ These five vows are:

1. Not to take life.
2. To be honest.
3. To tell the truth.
4. To abstain from intoxicants.
5. Chastity.

don't usually talk about these things with them. We invite the phonyis and worship them. We don't talk much with them. They preach the law and the 5 SILAS to us.

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16. Q. Are there any persons of influence in camp who give advice in everyday living?
A. Yes, the person of influence is the schoolmaster, U Khant. But he only teaches the children and looks to the general cleanliness of the camp. Another person is the man who teaches the English. But they do not lay down what is right and what is wrong.

Activities of the Family in Relationship to the Supernatural.

The main forces which U Myaing and his family are concerned with are those of the Nats and those of Buddhism. Speaking historically, the Nats seem to represent a remnant of an early form of animism in which the Nats were tree or nature spirits. It is interesting to note the manner in which U Myaing blends the two religious systems. The Nats control earthly happenings, and the Buddhist structure the eternal. We are concerned with identifying some of the major practices, but primarily with the differentiation between religious practices in Pantanaw and in the refugee camp.

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Nats.

The problem of the Nats came up in our study by the appearance of a bamboo pole split so as to form a small basket at one end. This object, called a KYAUNG ZAUNG rested on the roof of the camp hut next to U Myaing's. An interview in which Daw Aw Zar (D.A.Z.) and U Myaing (U.M.) discussed Nats, is given in its entirety below because it reveals the rather vague feelings of "superstition" held of the Nats on the one hand and their potency on the other.

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Q. No. 25 (photograph) is a split bamboo pole with a basket at the top. What is this called and what is it used for?

A. (D.A.Z.) KYAUNG ZAUNG. The thing he took from the roof and photographed? It is called a KYAUNG ZAUNG.
(U.M.) It is called KYAUNG ZAUNG.

Q. How do you use it?

A. (D.A.Z.) We offer to U SHIN GYI and others. Offerings to Nats. Didn't you hear that big man speak? (To U Myaing).

Q. Who made this object? Who makes them?

A. (D.A.Z.) The people who give the offerings of course.

Q. Do you have to make these when you give offerings?

A. If we give offerings we make them.

THE ORIGINS OF BURMESE DRAMA

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have been celebrated year after year; at least since the reintroduction of Buddhism in 1056, and at least since March, 638, when an early king of Pagan, Popa Sawrahan (613-40), drew up the present Burmese era, the dawn of every Burmese new year has been the occasion for mirthful water-throwing.¹

Buddhism had been introduced into the country through commercial relations with India long before the foundation of the kingdom of Pagan, but from the beginning it was only at second-hand and therefore feeble. The real religion of the Burmese before the re-introduction of Buddhism in 1056 was animistic, and they worshipped various spirits, known as *nats*. There were mediums, mostly women, who danced to please the spirits, and as the spirits were supposed to enter into the bodies of the mediums, sometimes it was believed that the spirits, and not the mediums, were actually dancing. Sometimes the medium herself actually believed that a spirit had taken control of her body, but usually she only pretended that a spirit had entered her, and gave an exhibition of acting. As the medium of each particular *nat* dressed herself in appropriate clothes, the spirit dances were essentially dramatic.² When Buddhism, in one of its purest forms, was introduced under Anawrahta, the great king realized the impossibility of attracting people suddenly to the new faith; so he compromised by recognizing the *nats* as Buddhist spirits and giving them shrines in his Shwezigôn Pagoda as its guardian spirits. When asked the reason, Anawrahta replied: 'Men will not come suddenly to the new faith. Let them come for their old gods, and they will gradually be won over.'³

So the worship of the *nats* lived on, and with the advance of

¹ Shwaw-Yoe (Sir George Scott) in *The Burman: His Life and Notions*, and Fielding Hall in *The Soul of a People* give detailed accounts of the feasts and life in the villages. However, as far as I have been able to find out, the Tazaungmôn celebrations have never been described in any English work.

² These dances are still performed on spirit-feast days at Taungbyôn (near Mandalay), a small town given up to spirit worship since the days of Pagan's greatness and perhaps even before.

The belief in, as distinct from the worship of, spirits is not alien to Buddhism.

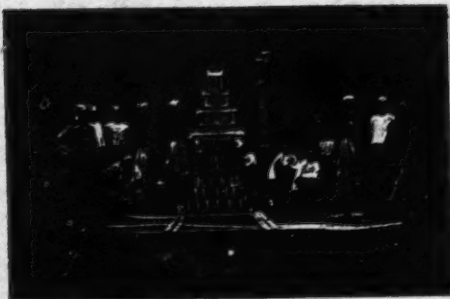
The chief works on the subject are: Sir R. C. Temple, *The Thirty-Seven Nats*; Grant Brown, 'The Taungbyon Festival' in *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, 1915; the same author's 'The Pre-Buddhist Religion of the Burmese' in *Folk-Lore*, 1921; and G. E. Harvey, *History of Burma*.

³ G. E. Harvey, op. cit., p. 33.

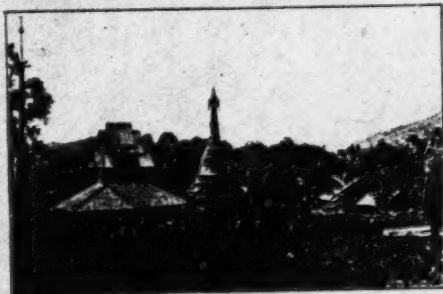
ANIMISM

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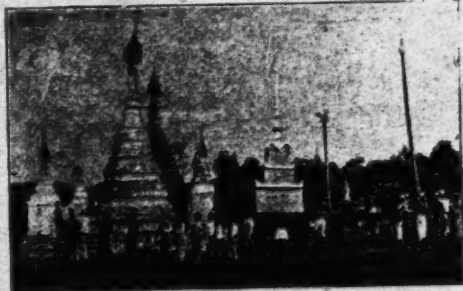
dwellers to whom the Burmans pretend to owe their origin. These ethereal beings are subject to the law of *karma*, and re-birth. They have to attain *nirvāna* like men, through virtue. Under "gods" in the Pali scriptures are to be understood such beings as these. Together with men they form the group *thaddavā* — rational beings—to whom the message of the Buddha is delivered. (See Stevenson, *Lexicon*, pp. 603, 788.) The higher orders of existence are not to be confounded with the higher religious states, *ayahāi*, *ayāttapā*, which are attained by the "noble path" alone (p. 46). In this fairyland, situated in the *Himawānta* *lew* (Himalayas) and its clouds, the poetry of the people centres. (See *The Soul of a People*, Chapter XXI.) As the heavens are indwelt by ethereal beings, so also everything on earth has its presiding genius. The heavenly *genii* are beneficent, the terrestrial ones friendly or malign. The *nats* of the mountains inspire awe, and their protection is invoked against wild beasts and dangers to wayfarers. A *nat* is pro-



420. RIVER ILLUMINATIONS AT THADINDYUT.



421. MAZES AT THADINDYUT.



422. TAZAUNGMON FESTIVAL.

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CHAPTER II

BUDDHISM AND ANIMISM IN BURMA

1. Animism or Buddhism?

It never occurred to anybody, remarked the Burmese critic quoted in our previous chapter, that the best way to find out what Nirvana meant was to consider its significance in some present, living tradition of Buddhism. His criticism was apposite in its immediate reference. As a matter of fact, however, it was precisely this course which *did* occur to Bishop Bigandet a century ago, as his voluminous footnotes to his translation of the Burmese Legend of Gaudama show.¹ The same may be said of his predecessor in the field, Father Sangermano, and of several successors.² Our present purpose is to take up the task where they left it. We hope to describe Buddhism in Burma in sufficient detail to exhibit the essentially religious character of the Nirvana paradox.

Since the context is Burmese and the reference is to Hinayāna or Southern Buddhism, Nirvana for the time being will be *Nibbāna*, which is its form in the Pali language of the Hinayāna scriptures. In Burmese, *Nibbāna* is *Nebban*.

One reason, perhaps, why this approach to the subject has been largely disregarded by Western scholars in recent years is the prevalent impression that the popular religion in Burma is a syncretism in which the dominant element is not Buddhism, but Animism. "Hinayana," writes Dr. Bouquet, in an outline of Comparative Religion, "is still 'the little vehicle,' because it does not and cannot appeal to the masses of any population. . . . It is true that it is the Buddhism of Burma and Ceylon. But anyone who knows these countries is well aware that the real popular faith of their peoples is not Hinayana but a thinly veiled animism."³

¹ Rt. Rev. P. Bigandet, Bishop of Ramatha, *The Life or Legend of Gaudama, the Buddha of the Burmese*, first published in Rangoon 1858.

² Father Vincentius Sangermano, *The Burmese Empire*, first published in 1833.

³ A. C. Bouquet, *Comparative Religion*, new ed., 1945, p. 129. Dr. J. B. Pratt's balanced estimate of the Burma situation in his *The Pilgrimage of Buddhism* (1923) should have done something to correct this impression.

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It is necessary, therefore, at the outset of our inquiry to correct this impression.

A writer on Comparative Religion is dependent on the experts from different fields, and Dr Bouquet is only repeating what a number of commentators on Burmese religion have been saying for the past fifty years. But if we examine their statements we find that many of them merely reflect, without further evidence or critical examination, an opinion expressed by a European official in a Census Report of 1891. This opinion was emphasised by another Census official, Mr. C. C. Lewis, ten years later:

"The Burman has added to his Animism just so much Buddhism as suits him and with infantile inconsequence draws solace from each in turn. I know of no better definition of the religion of the great bulk of the people ... than that given by Mr Eales in his 1891 Census Report, 'a thin veneer of philosophy laid over the main structure of Shamanistic belief.' The facts are here exactly expressed. Animism supplies the solid constituents that hold the faith together, Buddhism the superficial polish. Far be it from me to underrate the value of that philosophic veneer. It has done all that a polish can do to smooth, to beautify and to brighten, but to the end of time it will never be anything more than a polish. In the hour of great heart-searchings it is profitless as the Apostle's sounding brass. It is then that the Burman falls back upon his primeval beliefs. Let but the veneer be scratched, the crude animism that lurks below must out. Let but his inmost vital depths be touched, the Burman stands forth an Animist confessed."⁴

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Mr Lewis' opinion is based on a critical examination of the situation, and it cannot be lightly gainsaid. He also refers to the prevailing Animistic beliefs of the surrounding hill tribes who still infiltrate into the plains of Burma, a factor which encourages the survival of primitive ideas among the Burmese themselves. This survival is not to be denied. It is impossible to live in Burma without coming across evidences of Animism, sooner or later — the coconut, surmounted by a red cloth, still hung in most Burmese households as a *Nat* offering; the bus driver halting his vehicle to run across the road and place a little bouquet of flowers at the foot of some tree which is the shrine of a local spirit. Most of these practices are innocent. Occasionally, however, one has a grim reminder of more fateful beliefs. Burmese students once explained to me, reluctantly, that they had desisted in their efforts to save a drowning boy because it was obvious that he had been seized by the *Nat* of the lake.

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⁴ *Census of India Report*, Vol. XII, (Burma, 1901), Part 1, by C. C. Lewis, chap. III, p. 35.

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Animism in Burma is usually termed Nat-worship. *Nat* has been compared with the Indian, *Nat̃s*, but it is probably an indigenous term.⁸ Strictly speaking, it should be distinguished from "disembodied spirit" or ghost, for which the Burmese name is *tas̃*. The Burmese also speak of the "butterfly" soul in man, the *leip-by*, which may leave the body even in life, during dream or unconsciousness.⁹ "A *nat* is something quite different. The word is the equivalent of our word god, in the sense in which we speak of the gods of ancient Greece and Rome."¹⁰ *Nat* legends, however, express the belief that most, if not all, of these godlings were once human beings. Thus the familiar household *Nat*, Min Magayi, was once a blacksmith, Maung Tin Dè, a man of such prodigious strength that whenever he struck his anvil the whole city was shaken, to the great wrath of the king who caused the blacksmith's death. His spirit continued to vex the neighbourhood until a temple was built in his honour.¹¹ In later times such spirits seem to have been elevated to *Nat* status by royal decree. Burmese tradition emphasises the Thirty Seven *Nats*, but the number has no special significance. Many *Nats* not included in the thirty seven are recognised today and some of the thirty seven ignored. Any attempt to denote the *Nat* realm too narrowly misrepresents what is, in fact, a fluctuating and ill defined situation. 'All is change' applies to this realm, in Burmese estimation, as much as to any other. Nor can we point to any one origin of the cultus. The Mondaing *Nat*, for example, may reflect a primitive Nature worship, since Mondaing signifies whirlwind, but local legend suggests another origin.¹² Some of the *Nats* are associated with Brahmanic and Buddhist legend. Others are definitely local and even recent. Sir George Scott, who was an acute observer, said that the Burman always distinguished the Spirits of Nature from the legendary gods imported from India.¹³ On the other hand, there is a tendency to mingle Buddhist story and *Nat* story, and the Buddhist *pais*, as well as the *devas* is quite at home among the Burmese *Nats*.¹⁴

In earlier times, a victim was slain in order to provide a guardian spirit for a new town or building, and as late as the eleventh century a queen is said to have given her life for such a purpose. Buddhist teaching against taking life has gradually prevailed, however, against these harsher

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⁸ Cf. Bigandet, *Life of Gaudama* Vol. I, p. 17, Vol. II, p. 324 and Temple, *The Thirty Seven Nats*, p. 8.

⁹ Cf. Forbes, *British Burma*, chap. IV, p. 99.

¹⁰ R. Grant Brown, *The Pre-Buddhist Religion of the Burmese*, p. 8.

¹¹ R. Grant Brown, *ibid.*, p. 13.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹³ Temple, *ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁴ Cf. Bimala C. Law, *The Buddhist Conception of Spirits*.

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customs. Grant Brown observes that, while Buddhists in the Chindwin area still sacrifice fowls to the god of the harvest, 'the thing is done somewhat surreptitiously and shamefacedly.'¹²

Other practices survive more openly. In many Burmese villages there is a *nat-ka-daw*, or spirit-medium, generally an elderly or middle-aged woman, who is supposed to be married to a *Nat*. She tells fortunes, and is called in sometimes in cases of sickness to discover whether the patient will recover. Mr. Spear describes an incident of this kind which took place in the main street of a large town in the presence of many spectators. "The *nat-ka-daw*, in addition to her usual clothing, wore a sash around the waist and a cloth wound around her head. She danced with a *dah*, a long and heavy Burmese knife, in her hand, until she fell exhausted." Plantains and coconuts had been placed in a shelter, opposite the house, as offerings to the *Nat*.¹³

[782] In this case, apparently, the *Nat* was neither held responsible for the sickness nor expected to cure it. There are times of epidemic sickness, however, when a whole village is temporarily abandoned, and special rituals are followed to placate the *Nat*, who is considered to have caused the epidemic.

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In an interesting account of the development of a modern *Nat* cultus, a Burmese writer describes a public festival in honour of the *Nat*. A play is staged during which one of the Thirty Seven *Nats*, who is personified by a villager, asks the *Nat* of the locality if he is taking due care of the villagers. Here the *Nat* is obviously regarded as benevolent. But we are told that this was not always so. Formerly the *Nat* was cruel, unreasonable, mischievous and demoniac. But "he is now believed to have taken to religion, to keep the sabbath and to lead the life of a saintly god." In spite of his own sanctity, however, he seems to favour evil-doers. "No organised theft is ever committed in Lower Burma ... without invoking his aid." The would-be criminals cook a meal within a circle they have marked on the ground. If any of the rules of the succeeding ritual are broken, the proposed robbery is abandoned. Some Buddhist monks of this region, more orthodox than others, have tried to suppress the *Nat* cultus, but in vain.¹⁴

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Such beliefs and practices are obviously bound to affect thought and conduct. The Burmese feel around them a vast, invisible *Nat* world, which is both near and remote. There are spirits in the trees, the rivers,

¹² *The Pre-Buddhist Religion of the Burmese*, p. 2.

¹³ R. F. Spear, unpublished MS, *The Syncretism of Animism and Buddhism in Burma* (1928) chap. 1, p. 14.

¹⁴ U The Khin, "Is U Yin Gyi a National God of the Burmese?" *J.B.R.S.*, Vol. XIV, part II (1934).

BUDDHISM AND ANIMISM IN BURMA

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the lakes, the mountains and there are distant *Nat* realms ruled by *Nat* chieftains. All of these spirits are capricious. They encourage the view that life is a gamble. A man must bargain and wile his way through as best he can, hemmed in by a vague, immeasurable threat of evil. A religion, therefore, which points the way through the maze, indicates some order in the realm of caprice and promises deliverance from evil, may be the more welcome. On the other hand, it contains a challenge to caprice in oneself.

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2. Animism and Buddhism interwoven

There is no question, therefore, of the survival of Animism in Burma, nor of its influence. The only question which arises is the *extent* of this influence. Is it so persistent and powerful that Buddhism is no more than a surface polish?

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At first sight, this indeed may seem to be the case, for not only is Animism a parallel cultus, sometimes furtive but frequently brazen; it also seems to be interwoven in the very texture of popular Buddhist expression and practice. As a boy, the Burman learns how *Nats* watched over the infant Buddha, how the Buddha, by his virtue, defeated the jealous *Manh Nat*, how the rest of the *Nat* world acclaimed the victory with shouts of exultation. *Nats* appear in all the subsequent events of the Buddha's history.¹⁵ On pagoda platforms the boy may see scenes depicting the *Nats*. Early in his education, he may learn a poem celebrating the Buddha's victory. On the most memorable day of his life as a Buddhist, the day of his *shin-byu* or confirmation, he may *shikoh* to the *Nat* shrine. At his death, a monk may be called to his side, not to give him spiritual consolation but 'because the good influence of the monk's pious presence keeps away evil spirits.'¹⁶

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Consequently, Burmese Buddhists have been criticised for their inconsistency. How, it is asked, can a belief that a human 'spirit' has been transported to the *Nat* realm be reconciled with the Buddhist denial of the soul? If Buddhism denies the Divine, and even Buddha himself is not worshipped, how can it be right to worship and propitiate these *Nat* godlings? How can it be legitimate to expect their assistance, if man is the arbiter of his own destiny, subject to moral law alone, as Buddhism affirms? And Buddhism teaches: Thou shalt not kill. What, then, of fowls and oxen and even humans sacrificed to propitiate *Nats*? Toleration is

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¹⁵ Cf. Bigandet, op. cit. Vol. 1, p. 37; cf. Temple, *Thirty Seven Nats*, p. 6.

¹⁶ Cf. Furer and Saunders, *M.B.E.*, pp. 38, 97; Sir George Scott, *The Burman: His Life and Notions*, Vol. I, chap. XXII, p. 289.

doubtless a virtue enjoined by Buddhism. Carried to this extreme, however, has it not distorted Buddhism beyond recognition?

The Buddhist reply is two-fold. In the first place, it is claimed that there are *Nat* beliefs and practices which are *not* inconsistent with Buddhism. Since the normal Buddhist foresees many possible rebirths before he attains Nibbāna, there is no reason why some of these rebirths should not occur in a *Nat* realm. As to the denial of the soul, that raises difficulties, but are they so very different from the questions raised by the *Jātaka* stories in Buddhist tradition itself? The learned Buddhist has his own explanations, and the villager is inclined to regard life itself as ultimately as great a mystery as Nibbāna, while he does lip service to the *an-attā* doctrine (soul-denial). 'The Buddha accepted the Indian universe of his day ready-made' with its conception of heavens and hells and innumerable worlds.¹⁷ Popular Buddhism, as popular religion everywhere, lives in narrative form, and the ordinary Burman dwells in two worlds of story, Buddhist and *Nat*, which fuse together.

As to *Nat* practices, some of these are innocent, and others have been given a Buddhist ethical content. Gratitude, for example, is both natural and good in itself. What harm, then, if a villager presents flowers at a *Nat* shrine from such a motive?¹⁸ As to propitiation, even in this present life, men deem it wise to placate powerful humans. Buddhism, therefore, can wisely and tolerantly assimilate many *Nat* conceptions and practices without inconsistency. So it is argued.

Other ideas and customs, however, are admittedly incompatible with true Buddhism. These, it is claimed, have either been opposed or they have been tolerated for a time in confidence that sound religion would eventually prevail. Asked why he allowed *Nat* images in a Buddhist shrine, King A-naw-ra-htha is said to have replied, 'Men will not come for the sake of the new faith. Let them come for their old gods and gradually they will be won over.'¹⁹ This confidence, it is held, has been justified: Buddhism has at least prevailed sufficiently to take the sting out of Animism; human sacrifice is no longer tolerated, and even animal sacrifices are furtive.

Is there then no surviving superstitious fear of the *Nats*? This is debated. Temple quotes a formidable Oath, administered in the courts of law, which invokes the *Nats*:

"I will speak the truth.... May the *Nats* who guard the sacred heavens ... the keepers and wardens of countless shrines ... the *Nats*

¹⁷ J. B. Pratt, *The Pilgrimage of Buddhism*, chap. v, p. 78.

¹⁸ Moung Po Me, "Animism or Agnosticism?" *Buddhism*, Vol. I, No. 1 (1903, Rangoon), p. 95.

¹⁹ H. Ray, *Theravāda Buddhism in Burma*, chap. vii, p. 262.

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who watch and ward the mighty rivers ... may the nāga and the galōn, hideous dragons and cruel birds, all ogres and demons ... may all these spirits and ill things unite to slay me and mine to the utmost limits of kinship, if I speak not the truth. . . ."²⁰

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Respectable persons have trembled at the prospect of taking this oath, says Temple, so great was their dread of the *Nats*. A British magistrate, however, writing at a later day, observed drily that the fearsome Oath did not prevent false witness.²¹ Perhaps these later witnesses did not know its terms, since the Oath was not read out in his court, only handled. Perhaps, however, they did not fear the *Nats* as much as their sires did. We may indeed question whether men who can talk of the *Nats* reforming their ways and turning to religion can hold them in any lively dread. Smeaton, in his *Loyal Karens of Burma*, refers to some Christian converts who still propitiated the *Nats*. "We must throw some sops to the foul demons who afflict us," they explained, "but our hearts are ever looking for God." Their Buddhist neighbours might offer a similar explanation. They may still deem it prudent to throw some sops to the *Nats*, while their hearts are towards the Buddha. We may term such an attitude superstitious, remembering that similar superstitious practices survive on similar grounds in other religious traditions. But we may well hesitate before we describe the Burmese as *Nat*-worshippers or say that their Buddhism is only a veneer.

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The Burman may claim that, while certain aspects of Animism can be tolerated without inconsistency, Buddhism has, in fact, opposed the more objectionable practices, has prevailed against them, and has altered the attitude to the *Nats*. This, in substance, is the reply contained in an article criticising the statement in the Census Report shortly after its publication. The *Nats*, says the writer, Moun Po Me, 'are real beings to the Burman and Buddhism does not deny their existence.' But they are certainly not bogeys. It is only when the Burman deviates from Buddhist ethics that Buddhism becomes a veneer.²²

His verdict is confirmed by other observers who may be considered more impartial. "The nats were the gods of Burma before the Buddha arrived," says Professor Pratt. "But as soon as he came they learned their place as merely subordinate spirits, and they have kept their place very well ever since."²³ "Were spirit worship twice as prominent as it is," observes a Christian missionary, "I should still call Buddhism the religion

²⁰ Temple, *The Thirty Seven Nats*, p. 4; cf. Scott, *The Burman*, Vol. II, chap. XXVI, p. 250.

²¹ C. J. Richards, *The Burman*, p. 50.

²² Article in *Buddhism*, cited supra.

²³ *The Pilgrimage of Buddhism*, chap. VII, p. 127.

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of the Burman."²⁴ The most adequate inquiry on the subject to-date is the unpublished thesis by Mr. Spear which I have been privileged to quote. "It must be said," concludes Mr. Spear, "that Buddhism in Burma has kept itself remarkably free from the practice of taking ideas and customs associated with primitive religion in general and Nat worship in particular, and making them its own.... It is Buddhism which is the real religion of the people. It is what they practise in their best moments; it is what they want their children taught.... To be a Burman is to be a Buddhist."²⁵

We arrive, then, at the opposite conclusion to that stated by Mr. Lowie in his Census Report. Instead of saying that 'the Burman has added to his animism just so much Buddhism as suits him,' it is nearer the truth to say that he has added to his Buddhism just so much animism as suits his Buddhism.

Those who judge otherwise generally pay full attention to the strength and vitality of Animism, but they give less than due attention to the greater strength and vitality of organised Buddhism. They fail to note the intimate relation of the Buddhist Monastic Order to the life of the community. To this subject we must now turn, not only to accentuate the fact that Burma is Buddhist Burma, but to observe in sufficient detail the essentially religious context of the hope of Nibbana.

3. Monastery and Community

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A monastery suggests to many minds a cloistered company, shut away behind high walls, or secluded on some remote hillside, as frequently in China. In a sense, the Burmese monks are similarly secluded. The monastic building, with its seven-tiered roof denoting sanctity, is generally found just outside a village, set in a bamboo grove or flanked by shady mango trees. Rising to a tapering umbrella point (*Mi*) above the trees, there is a *tsedi* or pagoda,²⁶ which may be painted white or gold. Smaller pagodas are grouped around. Generally within the monastery building, but sometimes outside, there is an image of the Buddha, and probably several others — but always the same Buddha, Gautama, and

²⁴ Rev. G. Whitehead, *M.B.E.*, p. 37.

²⁵ *The Syncretism of Animism and Buddhism in Burma*, p. 30.

²⁶ *Zedi* or *tsedi*, from the Pali, means the offering place or place of prayer. *Paya*, which has also the latter connotation, is more frequently used for larger *zedis* and other shrines. The *zedi* contains relics. Hence it is nowadays often termed a pagoda (from the Singhalese *digagaha* — relic (*dhatu*) shrine. But pagoda is not a Burmese term. Cf. Scott, *The Burman*, Vol. 1, chap. xv, p. 186; Pratt, *The Pilgrimage of Buddhism*, chap. vii, pp. 126 ff.

BUDDHISM AND ANIMISM IN BURMA

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The Buddhism of Burma, then, lies in between two levels. On the one level, there is the scholarly tradition of the monasteries, frequently in touch with Ceylon, watchful against heresies, pondering the scriptures, upholding the essential emphases of the Hinayāna tradition, steadily prevailing against more primitive ideas. On the other level, there is the survival of Animism, linked to the conservatism of human nature, infiltrating the popular Buddhism. We can, therefore, accept Burmese Buddhism as a valid and typical expression of the Hinayāna tradition. At the same time, we can expect to find certain distinctive, Burmese features.

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5. Characteristics of Burmese Buddhism

a. The characteristic of Burmese Buddhism which has been most frequently remarked is its buoyancy. "The Buddhist faith may be as dreary ... as many say it is, but no one would imagine it who looks on the gaily = dressed laughing crowd of men and maidens who throng to the pagoda feasts."⁴⁵ Only a Chaucer could do justice to these festivals, remarks a modern writer,⁴⁶ and an earlier observer concluded that "the Burmese do not fully believe the first of the Four Noble Truths that life is suffering."⁴⁷

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Climate and circumstance affect religious interpretation. In India, where Buddhism was begotten, "India, with its hot climate, its poverty and suffering, the pessimistic mood which looks upon life as a great evil rather than an achievable good, seems natural."⁴⁸ This may be. And in the subtropical climate of Burma, where people live in ephemeral bamboo houses and vegetation grows quickly and as quickly passes away, it is natural to believe that "All is change." But in Southern Burma at least, where a little labour wins a sufficient sustenance from the fruitful earth, and moonlight nights are soft and friendly, it is not so natural to add that "All is suffering."

Some observers insist that we must look beneath the surface of this Burmese gaiety. "Delightful as this sunny temperament is, it does not go deep enough to be called optimism."⁴⁹ Nobody, however, can question the Burmese vivacity — a vivacity which expresses itself in a lively, rhythmic music, and a delight in colour. "The secret of our happiness lies in our devotion to our beautiful religion," writes Mrs. Hla Oung, and the

⁴⁵ Scott, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, chap. XIX, p. 257.

⁴⁶ G. Appleton, *Buddhism in Burma*, p. 46.

⁴⁷ M.B.E., p. 15.

⁴⁸ A. K. Reischauer, *Studies in Japanese Buddhism*, chap. I, p. 49.

⁴⁹ M.B.E., p. 53.

771 term 'beautiful' is here significant.⁵⁰ A Burmese *puè* or open-air variety
 779* performance will begin at dusk and sustain a frolic of wit and dance until
 [796] the morning, and the same vivacity informs the frequent religious pageants and dramas. If the underlying Buddhism is indeed pessimism, it is at least 'touched with hope and mysticism.'⁵¹

771 Fielding Hall has suggested that there is an element of Nature-mysticism
 779* in the Burman's outlook. Both his Animism and his Buddhism encourage him to believe that he is intimately related to all Nature: Buddhism because it will allow no separate souls but sees all Life as one; Animism because "legends and tales, the spirits of hills and rivers, of the trees and flowers" express the fact that "Life is a great whole."⁵²

82 A Nature poem by a fifteenth century Burmese Buddhist may be regarded as some corroboration of this estimate. The writer conceives all Nature doing homage to the Buddha:

"A clamour of colour fills the vernal woods.

Tender fruits peep from the budded quicks.

Mellow clusters, luscious as ambrosia, sway in the air. . . .

The acid lime, the delicious custard-apple, the juicy mango, the rest-
 less *petthet* and the riotous *grewia*

Rush to render their homage to the thrice-adored Sage."⁵³

In his later work,⁵⁴ Fielding Hall seems to equate Burmese Buddhism with a vague and woolly pantheism in which all tigers are lambs and all roads lead to truth, but at least he sees the poetry of Burmese life and religion. Later reflection led him to correct the view contained in his *Soul of a People* that the Burmese feeling for Nature was separate from their Buddhism.⁵⁵ Instead, he now discerned a fusion giving colour and buoyancy to their faith. "Here was the world the Greeks had lived in. All the gods yet lived to those who still had ears to hear their voices in the forest sounds, eyes to see them flitting through the darkened woods or bathing in the mountain pools. . . . Were the trees alive? Surely they were. They had their life, they were not dead unlovely things, but living." Comparison with Greek ideas has occurred to others. Greek gods and Burmese *Nats* are similarly very human and capricious, it is suggested.

779* The Greek comparison recurs to mind when we consider a further
 796 aspect of Burmese Buddhism — its social, with which may be joined
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⁵⁰ "The Women of Burma." *Buddhism*, Vol. I, No. 1, (Rangoon).

⁵¹ *M.B.B.*, p. 10.

⁵² H. Fielding Hall, *The Inward Light*, chap. III, p. 24.

⁵³ "The 'Tawla' of Shin Uttamagyaw," ed. by U. Po Byu, free trans. by Maung Ba Han. *J.B.R.S.*, Vol. VII, pt. II, (1917).

⁵⁴ *The Inward Light*.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 7, 24; cf. *The Soul of a People*, chap. XX, pp. 360 ff.

CHAPTER VI

IN CONCLUSION AND WITHOUT CONCLUSION

1. "Except for Buddhism"

As the result of this inquiry, it is possible to state certain conclusions. But the inquiry also brings us into that realm where man faces questions which seem beyond answer. We may, however, decide to frame some of these questions rather differently.

Our most definite conclusions relate to the character and definition of Buddhism, especially Southern Buddhism. If these are accepted, then we may claim to have challenged the classification which sometimes sets Buddhism in a special category, virtually separated from the other great religions of the world. "Primitive Buddhism," remarks Dr. Matthews, "seem to stand alone among historical religions in having no doctrine of god and spirit."¹ This statement is typical of many references to Buddhism in the comparative study of religion. For one reason or another, Buddhism is isolated and quoted as an exception. There is everywhere, it is said, some recognition of the sacred — except in Hinayāna Buddhism. Or again, it is said that the great religions are cultural, expressed in the life and institutions of some people — except for Southern Buddhism, which is monkish, cloistered and aloof from the community. Or again, the great religions have largely prevailed over more primitive ideas — except (so it is said) in Burma, where Buddhism, which "cannot appeal to the masses of any population,"² leaves the people to their Animism, with merely a lip-service to the higher faith. So the situation is sometimes represented — Southern Buddhism standing alone, so singular a religion that it is sometimes denied the name of religion and labelled a philosophy or a morality, unhappily (or happily) divorced from religion.

Questioning this misrepresentation, our first task has been to relate Southern Buddhism to the family of religions by interpreting its beliefs in the light of its cultural expression in Burma, where Hinayāna teaching has been the dominant influence for eight centuries.

¹ W. R. Matthews, "The Idea of God" (*An Outline of Modern Knowledge*, p. 66).

² A. C. Bouquet, *Comparative Religion*, (new ed. 1945), chap. VII, p. 129.

We can imagine the bewilderment of some Burmese villager suddenly transported to a township in the West and told that here he will find what he has not known in his own country — a religion permeating the life of the community. How many things he would miss in this Western town! Here he would find no religious teachers making the daily round of the households, morning after morning; no system whereby every boy is not only schooled by his clergy but spends part of his youth in their establishment, sharing their life. He could scarcely be gainsaid if he insisted that his own religion, as represented in Burma, was not to be distinguished from other traditions by the fact that it was *less* in touch with the life of the community, but by the fact that it was *more* in touch with that life.

We have emphasised this relation of the organised Sangha to the community, because it is the clue to the solution of many of the questions discussed. It establishes the relation of Burmese Buddhism to Buddhism in general, since the monks are avowedly Hinayāna; it establishes the true relation of Buddhism to Animism, since it exhibits the influence of Buddhism; and it establishes the relation of the monastic interpretation to the popular religion. Admittedly, a distinction can be made, as in other religions, between scholar and peasant, clergy and laity, but it is a mis-statement to disjoin them, speaking of 'two religions,' ignoring their inter-action, presenting the one phase as an arid intellectualism and the other as a superstitious travesty. Allowing for human nature and making all due qualifications, what we find, in general, is a religion which is both vital and intelligent.

Within this context, Nibbāna (to use the Pali term again) appears, not as a philosophical perplexity, but as a definitely religious aspiration. To the villager, Nibbāna may be remote, a further shore at the end of a long pilgrimage through many rebirths, but it is the ultimate fulfilment of his highest ideas of felicity — the Great Peace. The monk's conception is more allied to the moral and mental exercises by which he hopes to put an end to those confusions and those attachments to things transient which hinder his peace. In this sense, Nibbāna is Extinction, Cessation (of hindrances) — a negative concept. In another sense he makes a greater affirmation than the layman, for he prays that 'he may attain Nibbāna very quickly,' he has renounced the world in order to do so, and, from his present, imperfect achievement of inward serenity he can anticipate the end of the Path and the perfect fulfilment. But he knows that he can only do so dimly. Studying the scriptures and the *Abhidhamma* interpretations, he may speculate at times concerning this ultimate Nibbāna condition, as we have seen from Shwe Zan Aung's Dialogue. He knows, however, the limit of these speculations. "No intuition, no salvation."

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Nor is the discipline by which he hopes to attain this saving vision merely intellectual. For scholar and peasant alike there is an ethical reference, which is one of the bonds which hold them together. The monk's Path is a Path of Purity — moral purification, as he is constantly reminded at the fortnightly *Upasatha* chapters. Similarly, the villager associates Nibbāna with his moral efforts to 'heap up *kutho*' (worthiness or merit). It is partly his sense of unworthiness which makes him consider Nibbāna a very distant prospect — a sense of remoteness corresponding to the more explicit negation in scholastic phraseology. Hence, for both monk and layman, there is an ethical reference, and this reference is partly responsible for the view that to those who have not yet attained, Nibbāna must necessarily be a Mystery.

In spite, however, of this element of negation, Nibbāna is fundamentally a positive concept, in keeping with that hopefulness and buoyancy which we have remarked as a characteristic of Burmese Buddhism. It is a religious aspiration — so definite that we have ventured to describe it as the religious ultimate of Southern Buddhism, in preference to *Dhamma*, and also to *Buddha*, who is indeed venerated, but is not regarded as divine: he is the Pathfinder but not the Goal.

We have suggested that it is this essentially religious character of the concept which may explain the apparent contradictions involved in its statement, the shifting from Yes to No and back to Yes, the fact that it can be affirmed as the sufficient goal of aspiration, a state of utter sanctity and bliss, yet also denoted as the Void, and finally said to be inexpressible. These conflicting terms have frequently been regarded as logical contradictions. As such they cannot be allowed to remain in the same house together. One must be expelled to make room for the other. Or they must be referred to different stages in the history of Buddhist thought.

While we consider that most of the apparently nihilistic passages in Buddhist literature are susceptible of an interpretation which escapes nihilism, we suggest that both affirmative and negative expressions should be accepted, not as terms of Buddhist philosophy, but as expressions of Buddhist religion. It is true that they have been discussed by Buddhists themselves from a philosophical standpoint, and they are often joined with philosophical concepts. Nevertheless their basic character is religious. As such they are not logical but paradoxical opposites, a distinction which is considered more fully below. Nibbāna, in the context of Burmese Buddhism, is a religious ultimate term, paradoxically expressed.

In support of this suggestion, we have attempted a cursory comparison with similar paradoxical expressions of other ultimate religious terms in

other traditions. We do not suggest that this excursion proves that Nibbāna must necessarily be a religious term, but simply that it proves there is no reason why it should not be. In making this statement, we challenge the view that the Nibbāna language indicates the arid scholasticism, non-religious thought and essentially philosophical character of Hinayāna Buddhism. This might plausibly be argued if we were obliged to accept the opposition in the Nibbāna language as logical. It fails if we are allowed to regard it as paradoxical.

It should, perhaps, be remarked that we are not affirming that Burmese, and hence, Hinayāna Buddhism is a religion because Nibbāna is a paradoxical religious expression. The movement of thought is the reverse. What we affirm is, first, that Burmese Buddhism is a religion, and hence that Nibbāna is a paradoxical religious expression.

The comparison with other religions has, perhaps, served a further purpose: it has indicated the fundamental character of the relationship of the Nibbāna language to Hinduism. Other comparisons, we maintain, have sometimes proved too much, and also too little: too much, in identifying Buddhism *exclusively* with this or that trend of thought in Indian tradition, in so far as such identifications have been based on interpretations of Nibbāna language, regarded as the expression of a philosophical concept; too little, in so far as they have limited the connection to some particular phase of Hinduism, or even to Hinduism alone. The reference is more basic. And it is universal. Nibbāna, as an ultimate religious term, paradoxically affirmed, relates Buddhism to all such quests of faith, similarly expressed. Its reference is to man's complex and struggling estimate of his fundamental human situation.

2. *The Realm of Religious Paradox*

To relate Buddhism to Hinduism, Christianity and other religious traditions does not, of course, imply identity. In order to clarify the nature of this relation it is necessary to distinguish more precisely what may be called the realm of religious paradox which our comparison has brought into view. Here we can hope for no more than tentative conclusions, since our survey was limited and the selection somewhat arbitrary, sufficient maybe to show that the paradoxical expression of an ultimate religious term was not peculiar to Hinayāna Buddhism, but scarcely sufficient to decide the larger questions which arise from the study of religion in general. It may, however, be some contribution to emphasise that these questions exist.

Paradox, it was stated in our introductory chapter, involved an imaginative contrast, as distinct from logical opposition. This distinction

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